

NEWS FROM ED MARKEY

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CONTACT: Tara McGuinness

(202) 225-2836 (Markey)

Sarah Moore

(202) 225-5541 (Shays)

GOVERNMENT REPORT FINDS TSA INACTION ON IDENTIFIED AIR CARGO SECURITY LOOPHOLES

*Four Years After 9/11 GAO Report Highlights Gaps in Bush Administration Air Cargo
Security Policies for Passenger Airplanes*

Washington, DC: One week before the busiest travel holiday of the year, the Government Accountability Office (GAO) will release a report, entitled "Federal Action Needed to Strengthen Air Cargo Security" identifying dangerous security gaps in the Transportation Security Administration (TSA) policies for ensuring the safety of the 6 billion pounds of commercial cargo carried on passenger planes each year. Representative Edward J. Markey (D-MA) and Representative Chris Shays (R-CT), senior members of the House Homeland Security Committee, original requesters of the report and long time advocates for strengthened air cargo security, responded to the serious conclusions of the GAO report:

"Today's report should be a wake-up call for the Bush Administration, which continues to cater to the wishes of the cargo industry while refusing to require urgently needed cargo security upgrades that would make America safer. GAO's report blows away the Bush Administration's smokescreen that paperwork checks, random inspections and other half measures keep Americans safe. GAO has confirmed the concerns we have repeatedly raised about serious cargo security loopholes that leave airline passengers and crew members vulnerable to a terrorist attack that uses a bomb concealed in a cargo container to destroy an airplane in flight. According to the report, about half of the hull of each passenger plane is filled with cargo and almost none of this cargo is inspected for explosives before it is loaded on board. The Bush Administration is hedging its bets by inspecting only a tiny fraction of the materials traveling on passenger planes – under the current system the odds aren't good for the safety of the American people," Rep. Markey said.

"Air cargo is routinely inspected in several other nations and, given that the U.S. is target number one, we can no longer afford to roll the dice," Shays said. "I think we owe it to all families who have lost loved ones in acts of terrorism to make our airlines as safe as we can. Today's report underscores what we have been saying for years: uninspected cargo is a risk to air passengers and it's time to implement tougher inspection regulations."

In its report, GAO concluded that:

- Local TSA officials and officials representing airports, air carriers, and indirect air carriers recognize that some of the TSA regulations which do not require inspection of all cargo carried on passenger planes but instead mandate random checks may create potential vulnerabilities in the air cargo security system. (Page 6)
- TSA has not conducted assessments of air cargo vulnerabilities and critical assets, such as cargo facilities and aircraft. (Page 4)
- TSA has not systematically collected and used information on air cargo security breaches that have occurred in the past, which could provide useful information to identify the full range of potential air cargo security vulnerabilities. (Page 5)
- TSA has not taken needed steps to identify shippers who may pose a security threat, in part because TSA has incomplete information on shippers who are permitted to transport cargo on passenger planes. (Page 5)
- TSA collects data on less than 1/3 of the 1.5 million “known shippers” that ship goods on passenger planes. (Page 5)

The GAO also recommended some immediate actions to close existing security loopholes. Some of the report’s recommendations are as follows:

- TSA should complete assessments of air cargo vulnerability. (Page 65)
- TSA should re-examine the rationale for creating exemptions to the air cargo inspections. (Page 65)
- TSA should develop a plan for checking on the compliance of existing inspections and use the results of this analysis to improve inspections process (Page 65).

“100% passenger screening gives travelers a false sense of security on air planes. Americans need to know that their sneakers may be inspected but that objects the size of a car are waved on board. Is it easier to hide a bomb in a pair of sneakers or in an object the size of a car? Why are we inspecting all the sneakers and handbags and baby strollers while giving the objects that occupy 50% the space of the belly of passenger planes a free pass?” asked Rep. Markey.

Rep. Markey authored legislation and amendments requiring a three year phase-in of 100 percent inspection mandate for cargo on passenger planes. Reps. Markey and Shays have previously introduced bills mandating air cargo screening. In 2003, Rep. Markey succeeded in attaching similar requirements to the Fiscal Year 2004 Department of Homeland Security appropriations bill. After strong resistance from the Bush Administration and cargo industry, the provision was deleted from final version of the bill.

The Markey/Shays air cargo security bill has garnered broad support from numerous security groups, including the Coalition of Airline Pilots Associations (CAPA), the Passenger-Cargo Security Group, American Science and Engineering Inc. (AS&E), and the Families of September 11. In their letter supporting the Markey bill, CAPA wrote, “On behalf of CAPA, we are proud to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with you in the battle to close the dangerous cargo loophole that continues to threaten the security of airline passengers and crew. We believe that H.R. 2044, introduced by both you and Rep. Christopher Shays (R-CT), is a critical step in insuring that our nation’s skies are safe and secure.”

“We must not wait until disaster strikes before we close the cargo security loophole. Pilots and flight attendants, government investigators, the 9/11 Commission and homeland security experts all have pointed out the dangers posed by uninspected cargo. As the busy Thanksgiving travel season approaches, now is the time to strengthen the security of cargo carried on passenger planes,” Rep. Markey concluded.